

## Factors Influencing First Year Medical Students in Choosing the MBBS Course and their Perceptions about the Medical Profession

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Received: 25-10-2023 / Revised: 23-11-2023 / Accepted: 26-12-2023

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Conflict of interest: Nil

### Abstract:

**Background:** The choice of a career in the medical field is a complex personal decision which is influenced by multiple factors. The study of these factors is important as it may provide an insight into the perceptions of doctors towards the Medical Profession. Various research studies regarding the motivations and perceptions of the students show that the most common motivations are altruism, the desire to help others.

Understanding the factors that motivate students to choose medicine as their professional education can be of help to the providers of medical education in understanding the characteristics of the learners and their expectations when they enrol for the MBBS programme. Also, it is essential for the teachers to be aware of their learner's perception about choosing a career in medicine; thereby their learning can be facilitated more effectively.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 115 first year MBBS students who were willing to participate in the study by asking them to fill a predesigned questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions which were to be filled by the students in one or more sentences. The responses of the 115 students were recorded and subjected to qualitative analysis.

**Results:** In our study it was seen that multiple reasons were given for choosing the medical profession like service to the poor and underprivileged, parents wish, inspiration from parents etc. Respect in the society, job security and job satisfaction were considered as some of the privileges of the medical profession. Being honest, truthful and empathetic towards the patient were listed as a few responsibilities of the profession.

**Conclusion:** In our study some of the most common reasons which influenced the students to join medicine was serving the poor and underprivileged, respect in the society, parents wish, inspired by other doctors etc. As far as the perceptions of the students about the medical profession are concerned, they regarded it as a profession with a lot of privileges and responsibilities at the same time.

**Keywords:** Career, Medical Field, MBBS, Professional Education, Altruism.

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### Introduction

Today, there are great demands on both young and more experienced doctors. [1] The choice of a career in the medical field is a complex personal decision influenced by a multitude of factors. [2] The study of these factors becomes important as it may provide an insight into the perceptions of doctors towards medical profession. [3]

Several research studies regarding the motivations and hopes of the students show that the most common motivations are altruism, the desire to help others. [4] A study from Gwalior, India identified that selecting a career in the medical field is a complex decision that is not taken by the student him/herself but is affected by a multitude of external factors. Helping others was the top internal motive but earning money was a motive in

considerable percentage of students. Many students were inspired from some relatives who were already in the field. Some students agreed to the influence of parents on their decision. [5] The relationship between doctors and their patients has received philosophical, sociological, and literary attention since Hippocrates, and is the subject of some 8,000 articles, monographs, chapters, and books in the modern medical literature. [6] With the changing times the perceptions of both the society and doctors have changed towards the medical profession. Currently the expectations of medical students and new doctors is to have rich and balanced lives outside of the profession and to balance the health needs of the public with those of the patients in front of them. [7]

Understanding the factors that motivate students to choose medicine as their professional education can be of help to the providers of medical education in understanding the characteristics of the learners and their expectations when they enrol for the MBBS programme. Also, it is essential for the teachers to be aware of their learner's perception about choosing a career in medicine; thereby their learning can be facilitated more effectively.

### Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted among 115 first year MBBS students who were willing to participate in the study by asking them to fill a predesigned questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions regarding the reasons for choosing the MBBS course and their perceptions about the medical profession. This questionnaire was to be filled by the students in one or more sentences. The responses of the 115 students were recorded and subjected to qualitative analysis. Study was conducted after taking approval from the institutional Ethics committee.

### Results

The data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire which consisted of questions regarding the reasons for choosing the MBBS course and perceptions about the medical profession. The responses to each of these questions were recorded into various themes and the most commonly repeating themes were presented in the results.

To know about the various factors influencing First year medical students in choosing the MBBS course, the question asked was: **"Why did you choose to become a doctor?"** The responses to this question were grouped into the following themes:

1. To serve the poor and underprivileged- 46.1% (53/115)
2. Parent's wish or dream- 20.9% (24/115)
3. Respect / dignity in the society- 18.3% (21/115)
4. Influenced and inspired by other doctors- 11.3% (13/115)
5. Inspiration from parents- 8.7% (10/115)
6. Fascinated about the subject and curious to know more about the human body- 8.7% (10/115)
7. Ambition- 6.1% (7/115)
8. To earn money-6.1% (7/115)

One of the questions asked regarding their perceptions about the medical profession was: **"What are the privileges of the profession?"**

The responses to this question could be grouped into the following themes:

1. Respect in the society - 24.3% (28/115)

2. Happiness and contentment- 22.6% (26/115)
3. Service to the people -8.7% (10/115)
4. Job security - 6.9% (8/115)
5. Job satisfaction- 6.1% (7/115)
6. Good salary-6.1% (7/115)
7. Imbibe qualities like courage and empathy while treating people – 4.3% (5/115)
8. Gratitude from others- 6.9% (8/115)
9. Being considered next to God- 3.5 % (4/115)

The other question regarding their perceptions about the medical profession was: **"What are the responsibilities of the profession?"**

The responses to this question could be grouped into the following themes:

1. Sharing medical knowledge with common people-14.7% (17/115)
2. To treat patients well and equally-13.9% (16/115)
3. Being honest, truthful and loyal-12.2% (14/115)
4. Being empathetic and do selfless service-12.1% (14/115)
5. Getting updated with new knowledge in the field of medicine-7.8% (9/115)
6. Have good communication skills- 7.8% (9/115)
7. Being available to the patients anytime they require- 6.9% (8/115)
8. To exhibit humanitarian qualities-6.1% (7/115)
9. Role model in the society- 5.2% (6/115)
10. Respect other colleagues-4.3% (5/115)
11. Maintain doctor patient confidentiality-3.5% (4/115)
12. Being a leader in the health care team- 3.5% (4/115)

### Discussion

In our study it was seen that multiple reasons were given for choosing the medical profession like service to the poor and underprivileged, parents wish, inspiration from parents etc. Respect in the society, job security and job satisfaction were considered as some of the privileges of the medical profession. Being honest, truthful and empathetic towards the patient were listed as a few responsibilities of the profession.

This study showed that various reasons underlie the decision of students to join the medical profession. The factors that influenced decision-making are multiple and the process appears to be complex. In our study it was seen that 46.1% of the students chose this profession to serve the poor and underprivileged.

This observation corroborates with the findings of Zayabalaradjane Z et al [8], which showed that 28.3% of the students were impressed by the role of doctor in society and wanted to serve the society. The other reasons for choosing the medical

profession were, parent's wish (20.9%), respect / dignity in the society (18.3%), influenced and inspired by other doctors (11.3%), inspiration from parents (8.7%), fascinated about the subject and curious to know more about the human body (8.7%), ambition (6.1%). Similar to our findings, a study by Woodward et al [9] showed that parents were most commonly cited to influence their career decision-making, followed by siblings, uncles and aunts. The findings of Tiwari et al [2] were very much similar to the observations in our study, the most common reasons for choosing the medical profession being; want to help poor (36.4%), influenced by some doctor relative (10.06%), brother doctor (3.18%), sister doctor (3.78%). In our study earning money was quoted as the least preferred reason for choosing the profession, as only 6.1% of the students said they chose the profession to earn money. This finding was similar to the findings of Tiwari et al [2] where 5.66% quoted earning money as a reason for choosing the profession.

Contrary to the findings of our study, where only 6.1% quoted earning money as the reason for choosing this profession, a study by Priyanka et al [3] found that 54.9% of the subjects chose the profession due to its high paying capacity. The most probable reason for the findings in our study could be the fact that most of the students are hesitant and do not want to openly acknowledge the fact that they chose medicine as a career to earn good money because medicine is still considered a noble profession and a doctor's first and foremost duty is to serve the poor and the needy.

The student's perceptions about the medical profession were judged by asking them about what they considered as the privileges and responsibilities of the medical profession. The students listed respect in the society (24.3%), happiness and contentment (22.6%), job security (6.9%), job satisfaction (6.1%), good salary (6.1%), being considered next to God (3.5 %) as some of the privileges associated with being a doctor.

Ayoub et al.[10] in his study identified "medicine being a prestigious career" as the commonest cause of choosing the medical profession among the second-year medical students. This reflects the findings of the present study where 24.3% of the participants have listed respect in the society as one of the privileges of this profession. The findings in our study corroborate with the findings by Priyanka et al [3], where students were asked about their perceptions regarding medical profession at the time of choosing the profession and four main themes emerged from data analysis: Prestigious and respectful status in the society, meant for serving people, Capable of huge financial earning, ease of getting an employment.

The students were also asked about what they considered were the major responsibilities of the medical profession. Some of the responses listed were: Being honest, truthful and loyal (12.2%), being empathetic and do selfless service (12.1%), possess good communication skills (7.8%), getting updated with new knowledge in the field of medicine (7.8%), role model in the society (5.2%), respect the other colleagues (4.3%), maintain doctor patient confidentiality (3.5%), being a leader in the health care team (3.5%). Similar findings were seen in a study by Cuesta-Briand et al [11], where Students perceived competence as an essential characteristic of a good doctor, as 'you can't be a doctor if you don't know what you're talking about'. Good doctors were consistently described as good communicators of their medical training, students gained a greater insight into the importance of communication. Treating patients and colleagues with respect was viewed as an important component of medical professionalism. In a study by Sadat et al [12] Focused group discussions were conducted among the physicians and some of them said that "the doctor has to have a warm, empathic relationship with patients. He/she has to sense the patient's problem and needs". These are very much in agreement with the findings of our study.

### Conclusion

In our study some of the most common reasons which influenced the students to join medicine was serving the poor and underprivileged, respect in the society, parents wish, inspired by other doctors etc. As far as the perceptions of the students about the medical profession are concerned, they regarded it as a profession with a lot of privileges and responsibilities at the same time.

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